

News of the Network

An update on developments within the
VA Stars & Stripes Healthcare Network (VISN 4)



Serving those who served

July 2006

A Message from the Network Director

I am proud to say that VA continues to be recognized for its achievements in providing top-notch medical care to our nation's veterans. An article in Business Week's July 17 issue praised VA as providing the "best medical care in U.S." and having the most advanced electronic medical records system, "Veterans Information Systems and Technology Architecture" (VistA). VistA was also recognized this month by winning the prestigious "Innovations in American Government Award," an annual award sponsored by Harvard University to honor excellence and creativity in the public sector. VistA sets the gold standard for electronic health records. It allows our health care system to provide better, safer, and more consistent care to more than 5 million patients, and has helped VA save the lives of tens of thousands of veterans.



To read more about these two noteworthy achievements, please visit our Web site, www.starsandstripes.med.va.gov

Charleen R. Szabo

Charleen R. Szabo, FACHE

VA Pittsburgh, Network to Lead National Health Care Initiative



Based on VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System's successful program to reduce hospital-induced *Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) infections, the

leadership team has been asked to lead a nationwide VA effort to reduce/eliminate these infections. Phase I of the project will involve all of our medical centers and a few others outside the network. Other organizations, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, may also get involved in this important initiative.

Firearm Safety Program Launched

Because household firearms pose the potential risk of injury or death, our network is engaging in a firearm safety program. As part of this program, free gunlocks have been obtained by our medical centers.



Veterans and their caregivers may be able to obtain the gunlocks-- and training for their use-- through their medical center's police department. Gunlocks will be available until supplies are exhausted.

Preparations for Potential Pandemic Flu

Our medical centers have all developed a pandemic influenza plan. In addition, we are working with various state agencies to address a potential pandemic flu occurrence. To bolster these activities, VA Central Office (VACO) recently provided our network with supplemental funding. There is also a national VA pandemic flu plan. It has been widely distributed and is available on VA's Web site, <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/flu/>



Mental Health Assistance for Returning Service Members

Every network VAMC is available to provide mental health services to those returning service members who seek our assistance. DoD has also launched a new Web site, <https://www.militarymentalhealth.org>, where troops can seek help anonymously. The site allows members of the military and their spouses to screen themselves for mental illness--everything from post-traumatic stress syndrome to bipolar disorder. The Web site also suggests options for seeking help.



Network Wins Award for Business Contracts with Service-Disabled Veterans

VA Secretary R. James Nicholson has presented our network with a national award for exceeding its goal of contract awards to service-disabled, veteran-owned small businesses (SDVOSB) in FY 2005. VA Stars & Stripes Healthcare Network awarded contracts in excess of \$15 million to SDVOSBs in FY 2005, and expects to exceed that amount this year.

VA Commitment to Safeguard Sensitive Data

In response to the recent data security breach, numerous actions have and will be taken by VACO and our network to protect personal information about veterans, dependents, employees, and others. Veterans should know that neither VA staff nor contractors are to request sensitive information over the phone (i.e., Social Security number, date of birth, mother's maiden name, or place of birth). Veterans should be suspicious of anyone claiming to be from "the VA" who calls and asks for this information.



Facility Accomplishments, Capital Asset Program Highlighted

Medical center achievements toward improving patient care and satisfaction have been highlighted in a supplement to our FY 2005 annual report, "Significant Accomplishments- FY 2005." This publication can be requested through your local medical center or downloaded from our Web site, www.starsandstripes.med.va.gov. The Web site is also the place to find the recently updated summary of our capital asset management program.

